

A grandma's love overflows to more foster children

David Robinson knows a lot about growing up poor and a lot about growing up loved. "My grandmother taught me to be compassionate for others. She taught me that even if you don't have anything to give, you give of yourself," he says of Bertha Clark.

Bertha Clark stepped in to help when David's mother could no longer provide care for him and his younger brother Daniyal. Later, when other children in the Rock Island area needed a shelter from the storm, Bertha was there to protect and nurture them as well.

In 1990, Bertha began the process of becoming a licensed foster parent hoping to become part of the healing process families must go through when times turn rough.

"I guess I know how to do this because I understand the reason they are here. I love the children as if they are my own for as long as they need me, but I know they are supposed to go back home," she says.

Bertha remembers one foster child whose birth mom was in rehab. After he returned home, the families stayed in contact. Every year on the child's birthday, they came back to celebrate with Bertha.

"I used to send her little notes of encouragement [when she was in treatment] but the mom could not understand why I did this when I did not even know her. I knew it would give her what she needed to get her boy back," Bertha explains.

Penny Weedon, DCFS Foster Parent Support Specialist, notes that Bertha has excellent results from working with birth mothers. "Bertha is the

kind of woman who leaves you with a sense of peace and a feeling of having been with a wise and loving caregiver," she says.

Many years ago when Bertha took in her two young grandsons, times were tough for her as well. She sometimes worried about making the rent and remembers a Thanksgiving when food was scarce. But things got better and she never turned from her calling.

"Even though I had already raised seven children of my own, it was the Lord who was guiding me to help these boys. I know this is my ministry," states Bertha.

Bertha began to take in foster children when Daniyal was in early high school and David was a freshman in college.

"She would teach those kids the same way she would teach us and she loved those kids like she loved us too. My grandmother has so much love to give," remembers Daniyal.

Bertha says she just loves kids and likes having them around. And with God's support, she will continue to provide what she can for other families in need. And her grandsons hope her story will inspire other people to get involved just like their grandmother.



Bertha Clark started in foster care with her grandsons but didn't stop there.

*Up to a point a man's life is shaped by environment, heredity, and movements and changes in the world about him. Then there comes a time when it lies within his grasp to shape the clay of his life into the sort of thing he wishes to be. Only the weak blame parents, their race, their times, lack of good fortune, or the quirks of fate. Everyone has it within his power to say, **"This I am today; that I will be tomorrow."***

—Louis L'Amour

Central Connections

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Call with foster parent association news and schedules of local training, features on foster families and community members working for children, photos and news articles and supports all foster families can use.

Illinois Mentor opens new office in Champaign

Mark knows he can never go back to the family he began life with. And he is ready now to start again. Mark will be leaving the residential facility he has called home for the past year and Illinois Mentor will be there to support him in this transition to a family.

Illinois Mentor has been serving the communities of Champaign-Urbana, Charleston, Danville, Decatur and surrounding area for several years from their offices in Peoria. Now, according to Lisa Holloway, program manager in the Peoria Office, "our move to Champaign will allow us to provide the type of service our program is all about."

Mentor began in Boston in 1980 and now provides services to families in 22 states. Illinois Mentor, Inc. was founded on the principles "that individuals receive services and support in their own communities, regardless of the complexity of their medical conditions, severity of their developmental disability, or the challenges of their behavior, and that individuals have a right to be an active participant in the service planning process."

The office in Champaign opened its doors in April with a full-time staff of two. Darin Bishop was hired as Champaign Branch Supervisor and Lisa Wade will assume responsibilities for the recruitment and licensing of Mentor homes. At the moment there are just a few children who are being served by Illinois Mentor in this area. But according to DCFS, the need for homes in the Charleston, Danville, Decatur, and Paxton area is increasing. Mr. Bishop is confident that Illinois Mentor will be successful in finding the type of families needed to meet the needs of this population of children.

Illinois Mentor is a full-service agency providing specialized foster care. They are grounded in the importance of the one-to-one relationship and thus only place one child in each Mentor home. "The children we serve are the most challenging," noted Ms. Holloway, adding "these children generally have been placed in at least a handful of homes before being referred to us." Independence or adoption is usually the permanency goal. The adoption rate for these children is on the rise within this agency and this is a very positive sign for Illinois Mentor.

Meanwhile, Mark and Illinois Mentor are working together to find that perfect match that will support Mark as he strives to reach his potential and follow his dream.

Foster parents and DCFS staff appreciate the “Precious Moments”

Precious Moments was the theme for this year’s Foster Parent Appreciation Banquet for the Bloomington/Pontiac Field Offices. Foster parents from Dewitt, Livingston and McLean counties an opportunity to share their most memorable “precious moments” as foster parents.

Chris Brown, office associate from the Pontiac Field Office, with much enthusiasm and creativity, gathered the memories from foster parents with hopes of compiling them into a professionally printed booklet to be given to each parent at the banquet. But with funding for this year’s banquet being dramatically less than in years past, hopes of printing the booklet seemed dim. That is, until DCFS workers from both offices stepped in to help financially so Chris could carry through with her idea. Chris noted that several workers donated money to help with banquet costs and this helped make the printing possible. Stan Case, family development specialist from the Bloomington Field Office hopes the donations “will send the message to our foster parents that we love and appreciate them.”

The following are some of the precious moments that foster parents shared:

“I had a little girl who came into our home October 1, 2002. She was the most precious child anyone would want. I can see why her parents worked so hard to get her back. We loved her from day one and she loved us. We became so attached. It was as though she was ours.

The day came for her to go home. How hard that moment was. But, I was glad to see that her mom and dad loved her a lot. After time, we were able to see her and keep her in our home. I am glad to be a foster parent. And in this case, we were able to work with the child’s mom and dad. Not a day goes by that she isn’t thought of or talked about in our home.”

“I have many fond memories of my past foster children. The one that stands out is of a young 16-year-old male that came to live with us. He had lived in the Chicago area until age 15 and then moved to Bloomington, Illinois. He was very behind in school. He had virtually no credits. We had him tested and found that he was E.M.H. (Educationally Mentally Handicapped).

The small town school put in every service available. We found his birth father and reunited them after years of not seeing each other. We then transitioned him back with his father, step-mom and stepbrother in his senior year and he graduated on time with his class!”

“On my birthday, I got a call from my support specialist. She asked if I would be interested in taking a toddler. When the child arrived, it was love at first sight. From the beginning, her biological mother and I had a great relationship. After she returned home, her mother called and asked if we would like to have her visit us. Ever since, I have been “Grandma”. I can have her anytime.

Her mother has a good full-time job and goes to college in the evenings to become a teacher. This child is always immaculate, clean, and her clothes are always pressed. The house is also kept spotless. Her mother sends me pictures and cards for every occasion. What a success for this child and her mother, and also for my family. Most of the time, now, I ask to meet the biological parents. I feel it opens up communication and helps with conflicts because they know who is taking care of their children.”

“The most special moment I had was meeting our adoptive son’s mom and letting her know that we love him and respect her decision to give him up.”

“My 11-year-old foster son, after moving back home with his mother, sent me a plaque entitled ‘My Other Mother’ for Mother’s Day!”

Central Region Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children*
(Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture*
(Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 3 - *Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality* (One 3-hour session = 3 training hours)

Module 4 - *Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 5 - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member*
(Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 8 - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 9 - *Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 10 - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)



Springfield Area 888-817-1825

Module

LINCOLN - *A. Lincoln Memorial Hospital*
September 4 & 11 (Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 8

Other In-Service Trainings

Transcultural Parenting
JACKSONVILLE *Lincoln Land Comm. Coll.*
August 2, 9 & 16 (Sat) 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Champaign Area 888-467-6065

Module

BLOOMINGTON - *Comfort Inn*
August 5, 12 & 19 (Tues) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 2
CHAMPAIGN - *IL Employment & Training Ctr.*
September 9, 16 & 23 (Tues) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 2
MATTOON - *Broadway Christian Church*
September 4, 11 & 18 (Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 2

Other In-Service Trainings

Transcultural Parenting
CANTON *Wesley United Meth. Church*
September 11, 18 & 25 (Thurs) 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Peoria Area 888-507-7433

PEORIA	<i>Lutheran Social Services</i>	September 17 & 24 (Wed)	6:00-9:00 p.m.
	<i>Professional Park Plaza</i>	August 7 & 14 (Thurs)	6:00-9:00 p.m.
		August 19 & 26 (Tues)	6:00-9:00 p.m.
QUAD CITIES	<i>Black Hawk College</i>	August 6 & 13 (Wed)	6:00-9:00 p.m.

Springfield Area 888-817-1825

BEARDSTOWN	<i>Lincoln Land Comm. College</i>	September 2 & 9 (Tues)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
LITCHFIELD	<i>Lincoln Land Comm. College</i>	September 6 & 13 (Sat)	9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
QUINCY	<i>TBA</i>	August 22 & 29 (Fri)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
SPRINGFIELD	<i>Lincoln Land Comm. College</i>	August 2 (Sat)	9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Champaign Area 888-467-6065

CHAMPAIGN	<i>IL Empl. & Training Ctr.</i>	August 25 & September 1 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
DANVILLE	<i>Community Church of God</i>	September 18 & 25 (Thurs)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
DECATUR	<i>Webster-Cantrell Hall</i>	September 22 & 29 (Mon)	6:30-9:30 p.m.
NORMAL	<i>The Baby Fold</i>	September 11 & 18 (Thurs)	6:30-9:30 p.m.